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The Shakerite

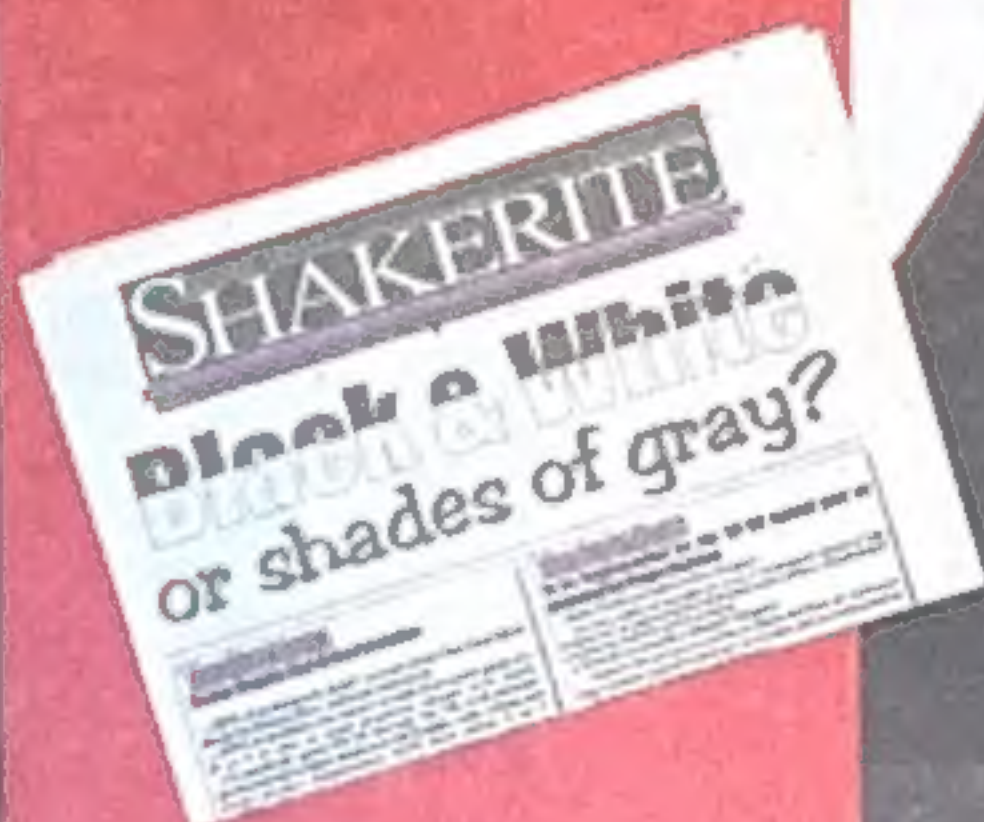
May 8, 2013 // Volume 83 // Issue 9

First Chat With the New Boss



**Dr. Gregory
Hutchings Talks
District Problems,
Goals** Page 3

**Inside:
A Shakerite
Special
Edition
Re-examines
the
Achievement
Gap**



**Shaker Myths:
Fact or Fiction?**



Can
students
leave if
there's a
power

outage? What if a substitute
doesn't come to their class? This
issue, The Shakerite challenges
the high school's biggest myths.

Read more on pages 6 and 7



**Boogie Sensations,
Then and Now**

Shaker's takes on the Harlem
Shake Inspired Graphics Editor
Josh Jacobs to take you on a
tour of dance crazes through the
years, and students speak frankly
about their classmates' Harlem
Shaker videos in Spotlight.

Read more on page 8

**Vavruska Swims
to States**



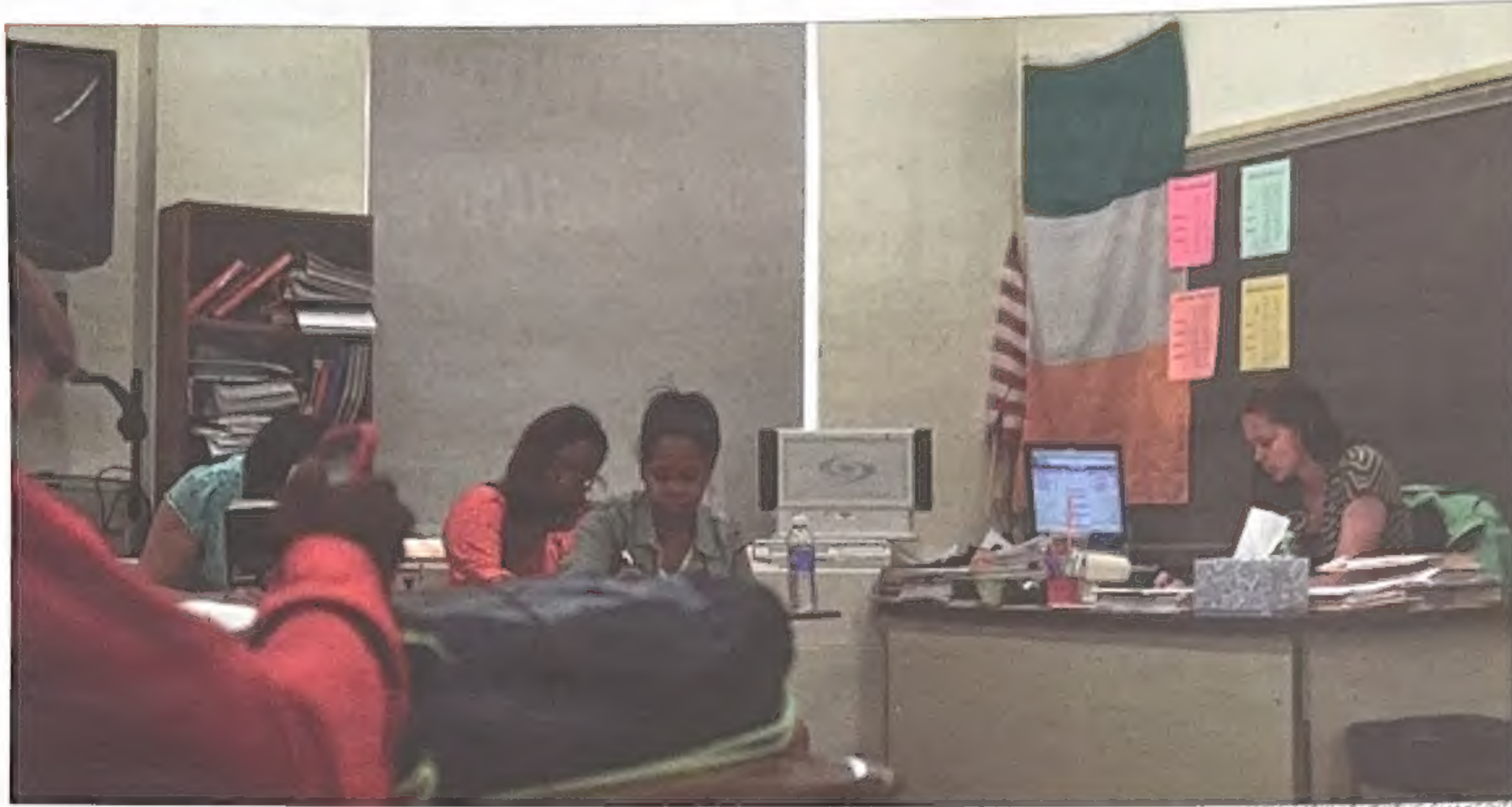
Lauren Vavruska

After
overcoming
a not-so-
common
swimming
injury,
senior

Lauren Vavruska broke a 25-year-
old Shaker record and qualified
for the state championships for
her third straight year.

Read more on page 11

Pictured at her desk is high school social studies teacher Jessica O'Brien, who taught at Shaker Middle School for two years. On its value-added report card, Shaker Middle School did not meet three of six state standards, failed to reach the adequate yearly progress standard and fell below its value-added measure. By contrast, Lomond Elementary School was rated Effective, and every other Shaker school received an Excellent designation.



WILL MCKNIGHT/THE SHAKERITE

Shaker District Rating Among Lowest in Ohio

But it's too early to rely on new value-added approach mandated by Race to the Top legislation

ABBY WHITE STAFF REPORTER

A preliminary trial of Ohio's new school ranking system rated Shaker 803rd out of 832 districts, just 11 places above Garfield Heights and far below Solon, which was ranked fifth in the state.

"I'm disappointed," Principal Michael Griffith said. "I'm disappointed anytime that the result shows we're not where we want to be."



Dale Whittington

Known as value-added rankings, the new system is mandated throughout Ohio because the state applied for and received federal aid through President Barack Obama's Race to the Top program. Value-added rankings

aim to measure a student's improvement over a year. At the elementary and middle schools, scores on English and math tests administered at the beginning of the school year are used to predict what a student's scores will be by year's end. At that point, the student takes two more tests that are used to calculate whether he or she fell below, met or exceeded predicted performance in those subjects.

Those value-added calculations come from a "mysterious set of formulae . . . based on prior students' test scores" that "we cannot do" because of missing variables, according to Dale Whittington, Shaker's director of research and evaluation. Prior to her 12 years working at Shaker, she taught at John Carroll University and earned multiple degrees from Columbia University.

This year, only students in grades 4-8 were

tested using standardized assessments to determine value-added rankings. Starting next year, teacher-created tests will be given in every high school class at the start and end of the school year. Teachers have been collaborating on those tests in cohort groups during Tuesday morning meetings.

The state is currently creating uniform end-of-the-year high school exams to use for value-added measures but has yet to create tests for the beginning of the year.

In the high school, testing in all classes is "actually tied with [Ohio's] new teacher and principal evaluation system," Griffith said. For teachers who do not instruct elective classes, such as art and physical education, 50 percent of their performance evaluations will rest on their students' value-added performance.

According to Whittington, value-added rankings are "based on a series of tests that are focused on assessing a very specific set of standards." As a result, excellent teachers have received low value-added scores because they "may be teaching reading and writing, but the test tests reading."

Whittington said that the new system relies on an assumption Ohio Achievement Assessment scores can be used to determine the quality of teaching.

"Whatever you look at in the student's scores on the OAA, whatever change [occurs] is part of the teacher's effect," Whittington said. Other learning factors will not be taken into account.

"It makes me nervous," said high school social studies teacher Jessica O'Brien. "In other states that have done [value-added rankings], it's turned into teaching to a test, and that means students aren't getting a complete education."

Shaker's rank as 803rd in Ohio comes from its 2011-2012 rating, recently released by the Ohio Department of Education. Averaging the value-added rank with Shaker's Performance

Index Rating, 362, gives Shaker an Effective rating under the current state report card system. The highest possible rank is Excellent with Distinction, followed by Excellent. Continuous Improvement and Academic Emergency are the lowest.

The ODE's individual school report cards suggest one Continuous Improvement school may account for the district's low rank. Shaker Middle School did not meet half the state's standards, failed to reach the Adequate Yearly Progress standard and fell below its value-added measure. In contrast, every other Shaker school received an Effective or Excellent designation.

Dr. Gregory Hutchings, Shaker's newly-chosen superintendent, plans to work to bring up the middle school's value-added ranking. "What I would want to initially do would be a needs assessment to determine the specific areas that need focus . . . [and] put together an actual strategic plan and action steps to address that," he said.

Based on conversations with administrators and teachers, Hutchings also plans to make changes district-wide. "Of course no one wants to be down at the bottom," Hutchings said. "So we want to strive to be ranked higher."

However, Whittington cautioned against relying on the value-added rankings as precise measures.

"Even the state is recommending that you don't place much credence in value-added rankings until you have at least three years [of rankings] because it's so volatile," Whittington said.

She added that the value-added system is "not as good as it could be, so you're using a flawed system that's perfectible, but not in the time that Race to the Top gives us."

"People glom onto [the rankings] as a reality," Whittington said. "I don't think they capture the true richness of student learning and experience."

**VALUE
ADDED
RANKING
SYSTEM**

SHAKER PLACED:

803

OUT OF

832

SCHOOLS.

THE AVERAGE
PERFORMANCE

INDEX

**RATING
IS 362.**

THE RANKING
IS MADE UP OF

4 PARTS:

STATE
INDICATORS

PERFORMANCE
INDEX

AYP

VALUE
ADDED
MEASURE

ACCORDING TO
VALUE-ADDED
RANKING MEASURES,

SHAKER
HAS NOT
MET THE SPECIFIC
STANDARDS.

HOWEVER,
THE STANDARDS
DON'T COVER
SHAKER'S ENTIRE
CURRICULUM.

Hutchings Set to Bring His Ideas to Shaker Classrooms

Expect to see the new superintendent during his 90-day tour of the district

JOHN VODREY STAFF REPORTER

Shaker's next superintendent is committed to the district but maintains his goal of becoming America's chief education officer.

And don't count on him to fold in the face of lake effect snow.

The Shakerite exclusively interviewed Hutchings, the next superintendent of the Shaker Heights City School District, via Skype April 23.

The Shakerite first reported the Board of Education's decision to hire Hutchings, director of pre-k through 12th-grade initiatives for Alexandria, Va. public schools, April 3. The board unanimously approved his five-year contract at its April 9 meeting. Hutchings will replace long-time superintendent Mark Freeman beginning in August.

Hutchings' take on Ohio's recently released value-added scores, which ranked Shaker 803 out of 832 public and charter schools, is one of perspective. "It's only one source," he said, and families considering sending their children to Shaker schools "have to look at the big picture, not just what the state assessments predict, or what they say about the achievement levels at the school level, but also the other opportunities that are offered to students at Shaker Heights."

At his March 14 appearance at the high school as a candidate, Hutchings mentioned that in Alexandria, high performing college-

prep students who meet certain benchmarks are automatically moved into honors courses. During the interview, Hutchings clarified the statement.

"You really don't want to force anybody to do anything," he said, adding that encouragement is a better approach.



Gregory Hutchings

He said that Alexandria students had the option to drop back down a level and that he would try the same approach in Shaker. He emphasized the need to include support programs for these students and explained that in Alexandria, school personnel call parents of students who are moved up to explain the change. Few parents respond by asking that their children be removed from an honors class, he said.

While Hutchings, 35, has moved rapidly through teaching and administrative positions, he said this post would be a long-term commitment. "I hope to be in Shaker until my kids graduate from high school, which gives me at least 10 years there. I'm hoping you all will keep me there that long," he said. "This is not a stepping stone for me... my life goal was to become a superintendent, not a superintendent at a number of school districts."

Hutchings pointed out that his family never purchased a house in Alexandria because they knew he wouldn't work there for more than a few years, but he and his wife have placed an offer on a house on Parkland Drive.

"This is not a stepping stone for me; this is my life goal. My life goal was to become a superintendent, not to become a superintendent at a number of school districts... It's going to take us at least 10 years for us to even achieve the high levels, or the high-level expectations, that I'm gonna set."

HUTCHINGS

Read John Vodrey's extended article and listen to the exclusive interview online at shakerite.com

In a 2009 cover story in the Nashville Scene, Renita Cobb, a teacher at the Nashville middle school where Hutchings was principal said, "When I'm in a nursing home, I'm going to turn on the TV and see Dr. Gregory Hutchings, secretary of education."

Hutchings admitted that position was an aspiration. "But I would like to be at least 50 years old by the time that happens," he said.

At his public session, Hutchings said that if hired, he would go into every classroom in the district. He reaffirmed this goal, saying that he would visit each classroom for three to five minutes within 90 days of assuming his post.

Hutchings stated his support for expanding preschool services in the school district in conjunction with the city. He said that doing so could prevent low-income students from falling behind. "If they receive that early childhood education prior to entering kindergarten, they may come in more prepared or better equipped to keep up with the other kindergarteners," he said. Shaker currently has a small preschool program at Onaway Elementary School.

Hutchings said he is used to being younger than those he supervises and being a superintendent won't be any different in that way.

On the controversial topic of snow days, Hutchings said that even though he doesn't have much experience with cold weather in Virginia, "As long as our roads are clear, and people are able to drive, and buses are able to get to school safely, we're going to have school."

EDITOR IN CHIEF SARAH-JANE LORENZO CONTRIBUTED REPORTING

Alexandria Colleagues Praise Hutchings' Skill, Knowledge

Those who have worked with Hutchings characterize him as caring and professional

JOHN VODREY STAFF REPORTER

Colleagues of Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings predict he will become an excellent superintendent of the Shaker Heights City Schools.

Conversations with those he has worked with in Alexandria, Va., as director of pre-k through 12th-grade initiatives revealed consistent opinions about Hutchings' ability to tackle a challenge while remaining likeable.

Gina Miller, president of the Educational Association of Alexandria, said she meets with Hutchings at least every two months. "He stepped into a very challenging situation" when he was hired as director of pre-k through 12th grade initiatives, Miller said, partially due to the district splitting up its two large middle schools into five smaller ones and the "insurmountable amount of programs" the district was implementing.

Miller said that Hutchings was brought in as a middle school specialist. She said that she had many concerns about the middle school reorganization when Hutchings was hired.

"I wouldn't say all those concerns have been taken care of, but it's definitely better than it was when the

schools were split," Miller said. "He did as good a job as any human being could do under the job description he was given."

According to Miller, Hutchings is "warm and outwardly caring," "he genuinely cares about kids," and is "a good listener." "I think he's going to do a good job for you," Miller said. When asked about Hutchings becoming a superintendent at 35, she said, "If he is highly ambitious, which I did not see evidence of, he didn't do it at the expense of his colleagues or subordinates."

Jodie Peters, Alexandria's IB coordinator, is supervised by Hutchings. "He brings a positive spirit to the team," and is "definitely well-liked among the staff," Peters said. She said Hutchings will make a good superintendent because he "is very goal-oriented," "understands and knows how to address the achievement gap," and is skilled at delegating. "Whatever is delegated, he fully understands the implementation of so he can also speak on it and know whether in fact it's being implemented appropriately," she said.

"I think he'll be very sound... it should also be a very exciting time for Shaker Heights," Peters said. According to Peters, Hutchings "is always, always profession-

al in every sense of the way" and that being younger than his subordinates has never been a problem.

"I think he's ambitious," said Peters, "but the ambition he's always had has gotten him to the point where he is." Peters admitted that she thought Hutchings would eventually be U.S. Secretary of Education, a goal he has described as one his dreams.

Keith Jabati, president of the E.C. Hammond Middle School Parent Teacher Association, said he has worked closely with Hutchings in areas such as improving the school's intramural programs and athletic field. Jabati agreed with Miller, saying that Hutchings was hired in a critical stage. "For the areas of responsibility that he was tasked to handle, he was able to function very well and independently," Jabati said. He added that Hutchings would make a good superintendent and that his young age is "definitely not a factor" in his leadership ability.

Jabati met with two members the Shaker Heights Board of Education when they visited Alexandria in April. "Some of the issues in Shaker Heights are similar to some of the issues that we are engaged with" in Alexandria, Jabati said. "From that standpoint, he's an excellent choice for your school district."



Gina Miller



Jodie Peters

Alternative Finals Relieve Exam Stress

Sit-down exams put pressure on students; projects, essays welcome

As the year is ending, students are getting nervous about finals.

Last semester I was told my finals would be easy because I'm a freshman. Instead, the tests turned out to be very stressful, and I studied very hard to pass all of



Rebecca Marcus
Staff Reporter

them. I was extremely nervous to take first semester finals and I am just as worried for second semester. Adding to my anxiety is that we do not have a long weekend to study this time around.

It would be much less stressful to take alternative finals, in which teachers assign their classes a project or essay instead of a sit-down test. These finals are weighted just like traditional finals. They are not widely used, but some English teachers offer them.

"My students that took home an essay instead of the sit-down final said it was a lot less stressful than a sit down test," English teacher Elaine Mason said. Mason's 11 Advanced English class students wrote an essay as a final first semester. "Different classes have different finals," said Mason, department chairwoman. "It depends on the class."

English teacher Cathy Lawlor also gives an alternative final second semester for her Social Issues class. "I feel that my alternate final is a better test of student learning and creativity and critical thinking than a traditional pen and paper, sit-down final exam," Lawlor said.

With alternative finals, students can relax a little more with all the studying. They still have to work hard, but the projects are more fun and less stressful than a test. However, students must put effort into deciding the focus of their essay or project rather than simply answering questions provided by the teacher.

"Each student must decide on a social issue of focus that we did not cover during the school year," Lawlor said. "He or she must then get to work in designing a unit much the same way that a teacher designs a unit of instruction for his or her students." Lawlor's students must include a lesson plan in their unit, and students present their lesson plans during the last few days of school. The project also includes a review of at least two films and one book. Lawlor said the project is worth the same amount of the student's grade as a sit-down final. However, the advantages of alternative finals probably will not prevail. Federal and state laws mandating new teacher evaluation systems will likely eliminate the chance for projects or essays.

Beginning next year, teachers will be evaluated by their students' performance on standardized tests offered at the beginning and the end of the school year. Eventually, these tests may replace all teacher-created finals.

Indeed, Lawlor is nervous that the in a few years the administration will cut her alternative final. Lawlor said she does not know if her students find her alternative final more or less challenging than a regular exam. "I am just hoping that with what seems like a movement towards uniformity and common assessment, I will still be permitted by the administration to continue alternate assessment," she said.

What Are Alternative Finals?

Alternative finals are any final evaluation that does not require sitting down and taking a traditional exam. Alternative finals include oral exams, research projects, analytical essays and in-class exams. An oral exam involves students preparing a topic for presenting in class, such as the 40 Questions assignment in AP U.S. History. Research projects typically require written papers that demonstrate significant understanding of a narrow topic. Analytical essays explore topics such as symbolism and characterization in a work of literature. All juniors in advanced English write analytical essays for first-semester finals. A student prepares for an in-class exam similarly to a traditional exam, but takes it over multiple class periods instead of one three-hour block. Many non-core classes offer in-class exams. Alternative finals are worth 20 percent of the semester grade, just like traditional finals.

COMPILED BY SARAH SHAW

Social Issues in Literature FINAL PROJECT !!

For the remaining three weeks of the school year, you will be working independently on a final project and presentation for class. This project/presentation will also serve as your final exam in this class. Therefore, it is worth 20-25% of your final grade! The project is a detailed unit plan on a social issue of your own choosing. Make sure the issue is specific and that it is an issue we did not cover in depth in class. You may refer to the suggested list for ideas. In addition to the unit plan, you will be teaching one lesson from your plan to the class for the presentation portion of the assignment. Details are as follows:

For the UNIT PLAN, you must include the following:

1. Choose one book to use in your unit. Read it and then write a brief summary, critique and a rationale for your book. Combined, this should be 3 pages or so. In the rationale, explain why this book is a perfect selection for the unit. What might a class learn from reading the book? What are its strengths? How does it connect with your unit? Also, provide at least 2 passages with context from the actual book. (This is very similar to a supplemental in many ways, but it includes a rationale. At the end of this paper, please provide MLA information.)

English teacher Cathy Lawlor gives her Social Issues students a project in place of a traditional exam. Alternative finals are popular in non-core classes where the stress of a traditional final might not be necessary. For their final, Lawlor's students prepare unit plans complete with book and film reviews and lesson plans, which they present to the class.



SASHA RAE GRANT/THE SHAKERITE

Rite
Art

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Reserve Judgement on Evolving Value-Added System

The state performance index school evaluation system is being phased out of schools to be replaced by the federally-mandated, value-added ranking system. The performance index measures grades and class difficulty in science, math, social studies, writing and reading, while value-added ranking give a much more cursory evaluation by only testing in reading and math.

The value-added ranking system is a product of Race to the Top, which is an initiative to reform the K-12 education system. Race to the Top is a federal government program that gives grants to states that improve their educational standards.

Schools that receive benefits from the Race to the Top program must use the value-added ranking system.

According to the Shaker Heights district report card, students in fourth through eighth grade are given tests in

reading and math at the beginning of each academic year. At the end of the year students take similar tests, and the results are analyzed to show the change in students' scores. If the scores remain the same, the value-added criteria are considered met. If the scores drop, the value-added measurement is below

expectations. If students' scores improve, the school is considered above value-added criteria.

The performance index system, which is a state ranking system, presented a much more accurate representation of the Shaker schools. Shaker offers classes in every subject and at wide-ranging difficulty levels. Because of the broader evaluations and the weighting system, the performance index more thoroughly evaluated Shaker schools.

Dale Whittington, director of research and evaluation for Shaker schools, believes people should not base their opinions of school performance purely on value-added ranking because of the volatility of the ranking system. The performance index is much more consistent in its evaluation because it measures academic achievement and not just the change in achievement. Value-added ranking measures academic performance based on the amount of material that students are expected to learn in a year. "The tests are not a fair and accurate measure of what students are learning in their classes, at least at Shaker," Whittington said. "It's only measuring two subject matters."

Shaker is ranked 803 out of 832 schools in Ohio that use the value-added ranking system. This is an

unfair representation of Shaker. Shaker is a school district with extremely high academic standards, and that is reflected in the Shaker performance index score, which was 97.7 on a scale of 120 possible points. Despite our performance index score, Shaker has extremely low value-added ranking. "It creates pressure on schools to maybe narrow what they're doing in order to make the numbers stand up," Whittington said. The performance index does not force us to narrow our curricula to the national standard. Instead, with the performance index, we excel beyond set standards because of the range of academics that Shaker offers.

Race to the Top mandates that schools use the value-added system, so it cannot be eliminated. But Shaker offers a large breadth of curricula that are fully considered if we maintain the performance index. Because we are in the early years of the new system, and it is still evolving, residents need to recognize that the value-added ranking does not define the district's performance, but rather its improvement based on broad academic standards. Residents should hesitate to judge Shaker as we phase in the value-added ranking system and should not let Shaker's rank affect their support of the schools.

Rite
Idea

SHHS MYTHS!

Who can leave campus? Whose fault is it for a no-snow day? What's on the fourth floor? This investigation, the Shakerite busts some Shaker myths.

INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR: Marcia Brown

INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR: Shane McKeon

GRAPHIC ARTIST: Josh Jacobs

MYTH #4

The Open Campus Policy is Only Open to Juniors and Seniors



Technically, the only students allowed to leave campus are juniors and seniors; however, with 56 doors in the high school, an open campus to just upper classmen is impossible for security personnel to enforce. "We can't have someone standing at every possible door," Griffith said. The policy is based on trust, but if the same students are habitually leaving, the school will look into that habit. In fact, the school security staff has a member whose job is to drive around the district and find kids who are wandering. Griffith is aware of the slight misdemeanors of underclassmen leaving, but he joked that the school can't have a dog-like electric fence for students.

MYTH #3

Students Can Leave Class if There is No Substitute for 15 Minutes



MYTH #1

Schools Must Release Students if the Power Remains Out For Two Hours.



The high school experienced its second power outage of the year March 18. Within minutes after the building darkened, rumors flared that state law mandates that the school must release students if power remains out for two hours. Unfortunately, there is no law stipulating an amount of time that students may be held in powerless school buildings. However, although two hours may not be the test, hunger is. "We have to be able to provide the federal lunch," Griffith said. "If we run into a situation that hurts our ability to deliver meals, then that would put us in a situation of closure." School will not close solely because power is out for two hours; however, if those two hours inhibit lunch or heat, school may have to be called early. Some students question why the two-hour myth persists. "It doesn't seem that logical. You don't have to have the power on to learn," sophomore Mark McKinzie said. "Sure, SmartBoards help, but it's not really making a difference in anything."

If only. The myth goes that students can leave a class if no teacher is in the room for 15 minutes. This belief likely trickled down to the high school from college students, who universally believe that in college, rules permits students to leave class without penalty if a professor doesn't show up for 15 minutes. Such a policy exists at The Ohio State University, according to OSU student Maya Boyd ('12). However, this isn't a college. "That's a complete myth," Griffith said. School policy dictates that security guards check on rooms that are expected to have substitutes; often they will have lists saying which classes are supposed to have a guest teacher. However, "If it turns out that there is no coverage, then we might release them to the library," Griffith said. Just hold out long enough—maybe the security guard will get distracted.

MYTH #2

The Many Stories About The Caged-Off Fourth Floor:



There is definitely a nuclear reactor up there. Or a dormant school pool. Or a roller coaster built by fictional class of 2012 presidential candidate Ch-aquarius Reese. Sadly, the fourth floor is home to storage. Construction equipment, tools and planks of wood are the dull inhabitants of this mythical space. And don't bother asking if you can go up there to pull off a senior prank. The fourth floor may also feature asbestos and other safety hazards, according to Griffith. "It's more or less like attic space. There are some parts of it where if you were slightly taller than I, like six feet, you couldn't stand," he said. So, no, Shaker Heights High School doesn't have a secret Narnia in the attic.

MYTH #5

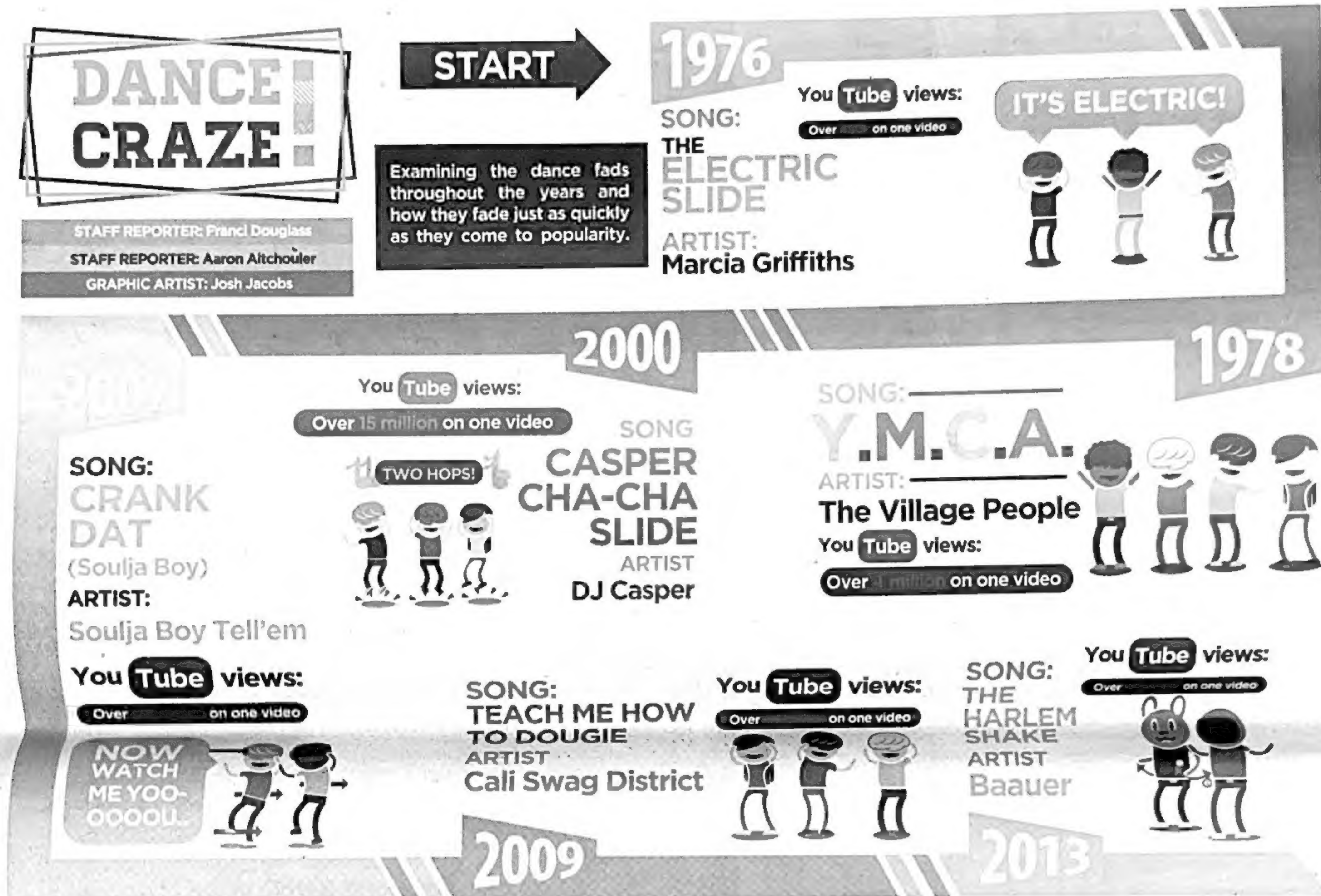
If There Isn't a Snow Day, It's All Mark Freeman's Fault



Students have spent many late nights (and some early mornings) of past Januarys refreshing the district homepage, praying that Superintendent Mark Freeman calls a snow day. Freeman has gained a reputation among students of being a stickler for snow days; while neighboring districts' students are sleeping in, Shaker students are struggling through blizzards to get to school. However, the fault should not go to Freeman entirely. Griffith describes a "committee of people" who assist Freeman in deciding whether or not school should go on. "It involves people like the transportation office," Griffith said. "If you can't get the buses out, that's a problem." The committee also communicates with neighboring districts to get a sense of what other schools are thinking. However, at the end of the day, Freeman makes the ultimate decision, snow day or not.

FOR MORE
SHHS MYTHS,
VISIT

SHAKERITE.COM



JOSH JACOBS/THE SHAKERITE

Shaker's Harlem Shakes Impress, or Not

The hockey team's YouTube effort wins praise while another attempt draws boos

FRANCI DOUGLASS AND AARON ALTCHOULER
STAFF REPORTERS

Shaker Harlem Shakers. It's very fitting, don't you think?

From the hockey team to SGORR, students are on board with the latest dance craze, known as the Harlem Shake. This song that inspired the dance was released by Baauer in May 2012, but only recently have people overwhelmed YouTube with videos of themselves dancing to the song.

Although from diverse sources, the videos all begin the same way. First, one person starts to dance in a public area, seemingly unnoticed. Suddenly, the videos cut to a scene that features all the bystanders dancing awkwardly in ridiculous outfits.

This dance and the phrase "do the Harlem shake" originated in 1981 in Harlem. The dance was described in the '80s as a drunken shake similar to how people imagine mummies would dance due to their banded bodies.

It's ironic how some trendy dance crazes die down almost as soon as they became famous.

"It's a catchy song, but I feel like it's kind of overrated," junior Brianna Sotkovsky said. "I liked it better than a lot of other ones like the Bernie and the Soulja Boy." Freshman Anav Sood thinks that the trend is overdone. "It was over the top," he said. "It was too much."

Shaker students have made their share of Harlem Shaker videos. The varsity hockey team and Ana Sinicariello's SGORR group are among those to post theirs on YouTube.

Freshman Josh Elmore commented on Sinicariello's video. "[It] was actually really cool, I really liked it. It was actually like a Harlem Shake, not some random crap like in the multipurpose room."

Elmore was referring to a Harlem shake video that was made in the multipurpose room. That one, according to freshman Margi Weiss, "seemed a bit out of hand."

Elmore agreed that the video made in the multipurpose room wasn't successful. "It was a hot mess. It would have been cool if they had it organized, but it wasn't organized," Elmore said.

"One kid's books got thrown all over the place," in

the video Sood said. "It was poorly made."

Sotkovsky was less diplomatic in her assessment. "That was the stupidest thing I've ever seen in my entire life," she said.

The hockey team's videos, in which players dance in their locker room and on the ice, got a lot of positive attention around the school and even showed up on the Shaker Schools Facebook page. "In general the [Harlem Shake] dancing isn't that great, but the hockey team's video was neat. They had creative costumes, and it was just funny," senior Louis Millette said.

Elmore said the hockey team's efforts were "almost kind of identical to the actual video. I think the [dance craze] was really good. It was really random and fun."

Sophomore varsity hockey player Matt Clements said Harlem Shake videos are "like a broken pencil -- pointless." Although Clements doesn't see what's so interesting about 30 seconds of dancing, he said that he did enjoy participating in the hockey team's videos.

Like many other things in pop culture, however, he thinks the dances are just "the fad of the time."

Sotkovsky said her favorite Harlem Shake video was done by Ohio University. "I've spent hours with my family watching Harlem Shake videos. They're just so funny."

A Common Space Draws Common Takes

The high school courtyard's recent makeover doesn't sit well with students

AMANI HILL STAFF REPORTER

In the heart of the school lies Shaker's courtyard, where what used to be a grassy area now resembles a mud pit with a few brick pathways.

The grassy courtyard once served as the location for ice cream socials and activity fairs. However, this year, some students feel that since its renovation, the courtyard has not been used to its full potential.

"In past years, the courtyard was used as space for an art fair as well as a venue for displaying clubs to the new freshmen at the beginning of the year," junior Rob Douglass said.

The garden was proposed by the Green Club and Garden Club, with initial plans to install an 8-foot fountain and offer students the chance to purchase personalized bricks lining the garden's walkways. The fountain was constructed, but then removed because its style did not coordinate with the existing space.

Students who remember the courtyard before its makeover generally preferred the space as an open, grassy area. "Last year it was much more appealing," sophomore Adriana Ponce de Leon said.

Some students believe the space is used now no more or less than it was in preceding years. "They didn't really use the courtyard for anything. It wasn't very useful," junior Lee-Jayne Howard said.

Students expressed some alternatives.

"I think they maybe should turn it into an outdoor cafeteria or outdoor lounge; a place to hang out," freshman Mica Jordan said.

Other students suggested making the courtyard more visually appealing to the students, staff and prospective students.

"They should build something nice in there; something to display. That way, if they are trying to get more students to come to Shaker, when they shadow, they can show them the courtyard," Howard said.



ANDREW BOYLE/THE SHAKERITE

The courtyard was renovated last spring from an open grassy plot to a large garden, complete with paths, trees, raised planters and several garden beds. The courtyard has been repurposed since its renovation. In previous years the garden served as a location for the fall activity fair, and for two consecutive years it was the location of the Pi Day pie toss. The courtyard now serves as an outdoor learning lab for IB and special education students.

Students suggest ways to use the courtyard space more effectively



Mica Jordan

"I think they maybe should turn it into an outdoor cafeteria or outdoor lounge; a place to hang out."



Mariana DiGiannantonio

"I would love to see more events held out there, such as speakers or art galleries put on by students."



Beth Cheverne

"It would be so peaceful to hear a fountain out there during class."



Karlee Kimble

"They should get benches out there and have class outside."



Lee-Jayne Howard

"Build something nice. That way, when students shadow, they can show them the courtyard."

Profiting From the Fact That Everyone Has to Sleep

An unconventional approach to fundraising enabled the Shaker baseball team to raise money for a new scoreboard by selling mattresses

ALEX SMITH RAIDER ZONE EDITOR

Schools continue to negotiate shrinking budgets, and athletic programs continue to become targets for cuts, but Shaker's baseball program isn't taking that fact lying down.

For many high school athletic programs, the biggest challenge to overcome is the economic barrier that arises from equipment, league and uniform costs. Some schools, such as Brecksville's baseball program, institute a pay-to-play policy, in which players must individually pay these fees and more in order to join teams. In Brecksville, these costs range from \$400-\$500 per player.

"Pay-to-play is becoming a necessity in many districts," said Shaker head baseball coach Mike Babinec. "Obviously, I would like to see this be avoided at schools because it tends to limit how many kids can participate and it affects how coaches select their teams."

Fundraising has proven to be beneficial for many programs, but teams can only sell so many cookies and brownies to raise a minimal amount of money.

Babinec explored different financial options and he came upon an unconventional fundraiser. For the past three years, the baseball program has hosted mattress sales, sending its players to street corners with signs and mattress suits to advertise to the public.



The new baseball scoreboard was constructed over spring break. The scoreboard was funded by the baseball team's mattress sale and replaced a 20-year-old scoreboard. "Selling mattresses is a far cry from the normal high school fundraiser," senior baseball player Jacob Shick said.

"Selling mattresses is a far cry from the normal high school fundraiser," senior baseball player Jacob Shick said. "It's always a great way to bond with the team, and dancing by the street in mattress suits always brings a few laughs."

This method may be unusual; however, it has proven extremely beneficial for the program. In its second annual mattress sale in 2012, the team sold 71 mattresses, resulting

in a \$7000 check for the program. That check now sits in left-center field as a brand new, nine-inning digital scoreboard.

This year the team sold 62 mattresses and plans to use the money to further develop the baseball facilities.

"It's a great team-building event," Babinec said. "The boys need to work together for a common purpose. It's a lot of fun to see the kids dancing and wearing mattress suits and

"It's a great team-building event"

COACH MIKE BABINEC

Determined to Improve, Athletes' Seasons Never End

Preparing for their sport year-round leaves some athletes overworked, injured and tired

AMANI HILL STAFF REPORTER

Coaches and athletes are so determined to improve their play that the Ohio High School Athletic Association forbids them to practice for a month after every season.

Talking to some Shaker athletes quickly reveals why that rule exists.

Junior wrestler Micah Shorts said his schedule comprises weight lifting during spring, camps during summer, more weight lifting and open mats during fall, and the winter wrestling season.

By participating in recreational leagues when available and partaking in personal, unorganized practice, students prepare for seasons months away.

Coaches are not allowed to begin pre-season training until a designated date set by the OHSA. According to OHSA regulations, a coach of any sport "is prohibited from athletic or athletic-related contact with squad members... in the same sport for the pe-

riod of time starting with the first day after the school's last interscholastic contest and ending 28 days later."

Sophomore Cameron Campbell, a basketball and baseball player, agrees with the rule. "Coaches would be selfish if they ran into other coaches' time if the player played a different sport," he said.

However, this rule has no effect on students who are willing to dedicate their own time to developing their skills for a particular sport. Students, not coaches, organize practices before the official season to begin training and conditioning.

Freshman Sarah Jacob, a field hockey and lacrosse player, said that pre-season training for both of her sports is intense. "Our training usually consisted of weight training, running, stick skills and practice games," she said.

Although intense, the training is beneficial for the athletes. "The earlier you get in and start working, the more down pat you have the skills in the game," said freshman football and lacrosse player Clay Brady.

Softball coach Jessica O'Brien agrees. "If you aren't training beforehand the coaches have the double job of getting your body in shape and getting you ready for your first game," she said.

Practice is especially important in light of Shaker's move to the more competitive Northeast Ohio Conference. "Those teams are always preparing and always

practicing," O'Brien said.

Campbell believes preseason practices really help. "They help build team chemistry and help players' attitudes toward the game."

Shorts agrees, but also acknowledged that they probably practice too much. "Practice makes the player," he said, but, "I think we practice too much and we have too many events. There are many injuries that our wrestlers play through."

More than 3.5 million kids under age 14 receive medical treatment for sports injuries each year according to Safe Kids Report on Youth Sports Safety.

"Personally, I over practice and will play injured, but if I went by just what we are expected to do, then it's just the right amount of practicing," Jacob said.

According to Safe Kids, high school athletes account for an estimated 2 million injuries, 500,000 doctor visits and 30,000 hospitalizations each year. About 62 percent of these injuries occur during practice.

"There is definitely such thing as overuse injuries in every sport," athletic trainer Bob Collins said. "Being overworked in practice and games can result in injuries."

Collins said players can be hurt or injured. Being injured suggests being in severe condition, but being hurt means there is only a minor problem. Collins said, "We have lots of people playing hurt."



Micah Shorts

Anything for the Extra Dollar

The NCAA has lost control. No longer is collegiate athletics about athletes. It's about making the extra dollar on the path to victory. It's been about that for a while now. Recent stories – Penn State, Rutgers, the opportunistic Adidas T-shirt created after the Louisville player's grotesque injury – only make it clear that NCAA member schools and affiliated corporations no longer even pretend that collegiate athletics are about athletes.

Although some athletes will always take the path toward the quick buck, NCAA by-laws should be revised to punish athletes and schools that commit violations with suspensions and loss of scholarships, punishments that hurt a team's ability to win.



Ari Ross
Raider Zone Editor

Senior Donovan Munger will play football at Ohio State University this fall. "You know you are talking about grown men, some who have come from nothing, so when they get the opportunity to get rich quick, they take advantage, but I think stricter rules would decrease scandals," he said. Munger will join an Ohio State program that was recently reprimanded by the NCAA for players' improper sales of memorabilia.

Many schools' athletic programs make more than \$60 million a year. Schools change grades, commit fraud and cover up violations just to make it one game farther in the tournament and make the school an extra million bucks.

Shaker men's basketball coach Danny Young said the result is an unhealthy pursuit of winning. "Coaches are under a lot of scrutiny and pressure to win at all costs," said Young, who added that losing records jeopardize NCAA coaches' livelihoods.

Yet, the NCAA's website states its mission is, "To be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student-athletes." The mission statement does not say the goal is to win.

Critics of the NCAA suggest that paying players would alleviate abuses. Munger does not think so. "I think it would be better for student athletes to get pay or compensation, but they [play] because they love the game, not for the money," he said.

Athletic directors, university presidents and coaches need to find balance between winning and student development. Unfortunately, so long as collegiate sports are profit machines, no sane college wants to do this.

Fans must take a stand against the NCAA to induce change. If money is causing all the problems, let's not give them any more of our money. It's the only hope we have to convince the NCAA to get back to its mission: to mold successful young athletes into productive members of society.



CONOR MATTHEWS

Senior Lauren Vavruska swims the 100-yard breaststroke versus Orange at Woodbury Jan 25. Vavruska made states and finished 13th in the OHSAA Division I women's 50-meter freestyle. She also broke a 25-year-old women's 50-meter freestyle record at Shaker. "Lauren is a tremendously talented swimmer who doesn't take her talent for granted," swim coach Eric Peterson said.

Vavruska Breaks 25-Year-Old Record

Senior overcomes concussion en route to her third OHSAA swimming state championships

ABBY BRINDZA STAFF REPORTER

When thinking of swimmers and their share of serious injuries, concussions don't leap to mind.

But when senior Lauren Vavruska's head met a counter top in early January, 2012, a concussion that kept her out of the pool for 10 months ensued.

Despite that forced vacation from training, Lauren still managed to break a 25-year-old school record for the 50-yard freestyle and became the only Shaker swimmer to qualify for the state meet this year.

Lauren admitted she was afraid she would never swim as fast as she had in previous seasons. "It was weird being out of the water that long," said Lauren, who is used to swimming nine practices a week during the season.



Lauren Vavruska

Lauren broke the 50-yard freestyle record by swimming 23.89, 0.04 faster than the previous record. "I was so excited, and it felt incredible," she said. Lauren has broken other Shaker records. "In middle school, I broke the record for the 50-yard breaststroke," she said. She also broke the 50-yard freestyle and the 100-yard freestyle records at Spire Institute this past year.

Head swim coach Eric Peterson had a feeling she could break the record. "She had a very strong freshman year, and we thought it might be possible for her to work up towards breaking the 50 record," said Peterson, who just completed his sixth year at the helm.

Before the season started, Lauren conditioned by rowing for the spring and fall crew seasons. "Crew really was

the reason I broke the record," she said. "It strengthened my legs, which are the weak part of my race."

During Lauren's freshman year, her sister, Marisa, was also on the team. The sibling rivalry ultimately pushed both sisters to work harder. "Freshman year we were always put against each other. Coaches would put us together and place bets on who would win," Lauren said.

Ironically, given her concussion, Lauren began swimming because her sister swam, and her mother wanted Lauren to be safe. "I would run around in the stands during my sister's swim practices, and my mom thought I would crack my head open, so she signed me up," she said.

Lauren qualified for states all three years she was healthy, but her familiarity with the competition didn't tarnish her excitement this year.

"Going to states is always exciting. There are so many people, and it is a great experience," Lauren said. "However, this year it was a bit lonely being the only one." Lauren described states as a competitive intense atmosphere that makes you want to go fast. Lauren tied for 13th at states this year with a 24.6 in the 50-yard freestyle.

"Lauren worked hard in and out of the pool this year," said sophomore swimmer Casey Crowley. Crowley said Lauren displayed a great attitude during practices that teammates found challenging. Crowley added that Lauren helped her to look at challenging practices as an opportunity to make herself faster and to cheer on her teammates.

Lauren will attend Dartmouth College this fall, but she ended her competitive swimming career this season because she doesn't like swimming enough to commit at a Division I program.

"Lauren is a tremendously talented swimmer who doesn't take her talent for granted, Peterson said. "She has worked very hard throughout her high school career to achieve the level of success she has attained."

THE SHAKERITE

May 8, 2013 // Volume 89 // Special Edition

Special Edition

Shades of Gray



The Shakerite's initial coverage of the achievement gap ignited controversy across the community. Above, community members gather to discuss The Shakerite's coverage with a WEWS news reporter. That story appeared in a 1998 documentary titled "Shaker Heights: The Struggle for Integration."

Taking a closer look at Shaker's achievement gap

KATHLEEN KALAFATIS SENIOR WRITER

The Shaker community is nationally heralded for its diversity and academic achievement.

In February 1997, The Shakerite published statistics revealing a striking disparity in academic achievement between African-American and Caucasian students. This disparity, known nationally as the achievement gap, has since persisted despite district efforts to solve it. The issue ignited immediate controversy throughout the community. Soon, the debate surrounding the achievement gap in Shaker Heights caught national attention.

The Shakerite decided to revisit the issue in this special edition. This edition will investigate the district's efforts to resolve the gap, the causes and depth of the gap at various grade levels and potential solutions to narrow the gap 16 years after it caught the public's eye.

Freeman Notes Gains, Remaining Work

JULIA SCHARFSTEIN AND SHANE MCKEON MANAGING WEB EDITOR AND INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR

Superintendent Mark Freeman explained that the achievement gap was identified before the infamous February 1997 Shakerite edition. "It was documented back in the late 1960s, and we have been working since then to improve it," Freeman said.

Freeman explained that there is a substantial achievement gap by race, but this only accounts for averages, and there are many high-achieving minority students.

The 2010-11 district fact book states that Shaker's African-American students have outscored Ohio African-American students on the Ohio Graduation Test every year since 2007, and that "anywhere from 3 (1991-92) to 31 (1972-73) African-American students have been recognized as Semifinalists or

Commended Scholars by the National Achievement Scholarship Program."

Director of Communications Peggy Caldwell listed some major programs designed to eliminate the gap. The programs include screening kindergardeners for pre-reading skills to identify those that need the most help, the MAC Scholars program, which has been expanded to the middle school and Woodbury Elementary School, test-based monitoring for elementary student's progress and "a lot of trial and error," Caldwell said.

The district has also made efforts to minimize the issue of transient students by assigning new students peer "buddies" or teachers who periodically check their progress adapting to Shaker.

Freeman commented on the district's success but also its necessary, unfinished work. "We have done

fabulously in working to educate our kids in the district. There is student leadership, awards won, scholarships and high GPAs by students of color in the district," Freeman said. "We have made great gains but we have nowhere near eliminated the gap, nor do I know of other school districts that have."

Freeman acknowledges that not all students perform equally, but aspires to a time when "race was not a predictor of school success," he said.

Freeman said substantial investment in early childhood education is needed with support to young parents, and the district should better address students' health and well-being.

"The answers and solutions are in front of us," Freeman said. "But as a country, we have to have the will to invest in young people. Education should not be survival of the fittest."

On the
WEB

Administrative Opinions

Efforts at Middle School

Students Speak

SENSE OF COMMUNITY VITAL TO CLOSING GAP

Harvard's Ron Ferguson, who studied the district, says solutions lie in part beyond school doors

LIZ JACOB WEB EDITOR IN CHIEF

"The district must move past the idea that only certain highfalutin' jobs are worth aspiring to. The community must instill in students of all skill levels the belief that all jobs are worth aspiring for and striving towards," said Ronald F. Ferguson, senior lecturer in education and public policy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, in a phone interview.

The achievement gap is defined as the gulf between the academic achievement of one group of high achieving students and that of low achieving students. According to Ferguson, solving an issue entrenched in low test scores, subpar academic performance and group stereotypes will require a communitywide revision of what constitutes success.

Following The Shakerite's 1997 publication of district statistics showcasing a racially based achievement gap, the district has engaged a number of scholars from different schools of thought to examine the issue. Ferguson was consulted by the district to survey students and teachers regarding the classroom environment. Ferguson's findings at the time concluded that classroom environment and teacher-student relations were the driving factors of an achievement gap. The late Dr. John U. Ogbu was an anthropology professor at the University of California, Berkeley who used the achievement gap in Shaker Heights as a case study presented within his book "Black American Studies in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement." Within the study, Ogbu concluded that culture and family dynamics most strongly lead to a racial achievement gap in Shaker Heights. Dr. Ruby Payne also consulted for the district and worked with teachers and administrators to understand the impact socioeconomic status and class, particularly poverty, has upon a student's ability to learn.

Ferguson created the Tripod Project for School Improvement, which was based upon consultations with K-12 teachers and administrators in the Shaker Heights school district during the 2000-2001 school year. "The purpose of the project is to provide feedback to teachers and school leaders on how students experience the classroom," Ferguson said.

The Tripod project, which Ferguson extended to districts throughout the country, is conducted by surveying students to gauge their experiences in the classroom, their engagement to class work and learning and the peer culture and overall atmosphere of the schools. The goal is to analyze student responses to create a strategic plan that can be used by teachers and administrators to enhance learning.

From the project's findings around the nation, Ferguson notes the complexities of the achievement gap and the need for community support. "You want a school community

that celebrates effort and progress and that values and encourages everyone, and one that doesn't make people feel like they are stigmatized, or that they should hide effort, or that they shouldn't care about their education," he said.

Thirteen years after his work in Shaker Heights, Ferguson's focus has shifted from focusing on the achievement gap to encompassing the value of individual achievement and potential. "The focus should not be upon closing the achievement gap in the district; the focus should be upon helping every student in the district to maximize their individual intellectual growth," said Ferguson.

Ferguson identified a number of factors contributing to the achievement gap in a community, one being that "poverty affects your opportunities to learn, as well as your state of mind due to the stress of your situation."

Bethanie Tucker is a consultant at Aha! Processing, Inc., the company founded by Dr. Ruby Payne in 1994. Payne is noted for her book "A Framework for Understanding Poverty," which analyzes the impact of poverty upon a student's academic performance and relationships in the educational setting. Payne argues that hidden rules about behavior and language exist within the upper, middle and lower classes. Because schools are middle class institutions and teachers typically come from middle class backgrounds, students from impoverished backgrounds don't understand the hidden rules of the middle class and, consequently, struggle to navigate their school experience.

Tucker identified socioeconomic status as a root of the achievement issue. "[One cause is] poorly developed cognitive skills," Tucker said. "One example is the ability to plan, which is critical for success in the decontextualized environment of school but sometimes not taught or learned in environments of generational poverty."

"Student inability to connect with subjects, teachers, and peers, because of poverty-related issues and the lack of intergenerational transfer of knowledge" can result in an achievement gap, Tucker said.

Payne's work has drawn criticism from scholars who say it perpetuates stereotypes about the poor while ignoring the role of systemic poverty in limiting individuals' efforts to surmount it.

While socioeconomic status, race and cultural and family background influence achievement, Ferguson has found that disparity in life experiences broadly explains the gap.

"From the time you're a little baby to your current age, you have all kinds of life experience," Ferguson said. "They vary based upon the resources your family has, the activities a person had, who your friends are and how they want to spend their time, the effort you put forth and some of the opportunities you have available to you."

Tucker said Payne relies on Maria Montano-Harmon's research into the impact of life experience upon a student's understanding of formal register, and subsequently their

achievement in school. Register refers to the level or formality that characterizes speech or written language. Formal register relies on Standard American English and is used in impersonal social situations, professional environments and in academic writing. "Montano-Harmon found that most students from less-educated households and students from poverty don't hear formal register at home," Tucker said. "The problem is that all the state and national tests—SAT, ACT, etc.—are in formal register. Further complicating the matter is that to get a well-paying job, one is expected to be able to use formal register. The ability to use formal register is a hidden rule of middle class."

To counter this, the community should be a part of the social movement for excellence with equity. This movement encourages the collective pursuit of excellence, while celebrating the achievements of individuals of all backgrounds. Ferguson asserts that the community's social ecology must be centered on the progress of every student, regardless of their level of achievement.

"We need to bring the whole community together in a way that the adults in the community can collectively take responsibility for child and youth development," Ferguson said. "They collectively take responsibility that children learn, so that they grow up happy and healthy, that they can get what they need and receive positive reinforcement to stay on course and on task." The focus must then be upon a group's achievement meeting external benchmarks instead of competing with other groups in the community.

"If you want to close the achievement gap, focus upon some external standard. So that it's not about comparing black students to white students or students with high achievement against one another within in district and focusing on that gap. You want every group in the district to feel like they've got a stake in the district's effort to improve academic outcome," Ferguson said. "Ultimately we are trying to prepare each student in the district to compete with the world, not with just their classmates."

How then, can a school district enable students to meet external benchmarks? Ferguson believes the easiest way to deal with the problem is to "change the way teachers adjust and adapt their instruction to meet the needs of students based upon the student's background. This is the idea of differentiated instruction. We need to have an impact upon peer dynamics, in other words the way students treat each other. The way students give each other positive encouragement and support. We need to get the employer community involved in order to give students images of possible selves. Here are lots of examples of who you could become, along with information about what it would take to achieve these possible selves."

"Part of this is centered on giving students a sense of meaning and purpose so that they can have an image of exactly what they can become. This drives them and keeps

them working hard even when it gets difficult," he said.

Similarly, Tucker said that if real-world rules are established in the classroom, students will be able to better adapt to social situations.

"Directly teach hidden rules of the professional world. Hidden rules are important because they impact relationships. When hidden rules are broken, offense is frequently taken, and then the relationship doesn't get a chance to develop. One of the key issues in making the transition from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth is to develop social bridging capital—in other words, developing relationships with people different from you," Tucker said.

Curriculums will also need to include examples of how the content can be applied to real-life situations. The hope is that this type of instruction will motivate both low- and high-achieving students to push themselves academically.

Improving peer relations is another possible solution to this problem. After conducting a project at the middle school level in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Ferguson noted the disposition of some high achievers to become "intellectual bullies" of lower achieving classmates when working on group problem solving. Ferguson found that this "intellectual bullying" can negatively impact struggling students by making them feel "bad about themselves and [causing them] to be likely to give up or to be convinced that they are unable to do any better."

Ferguson believes that achieving a higher level of peer support in all types of classrooms will form a symbiotic relationship between high- and low-achieving students. "When you work with someone who doesn't have as much skill as you do at this point in time, realize that this is not necessarily a permanent condition," he said. "They may not improve as fast as you want them to, but you can be either a positive or a negative influence. Even though it may build your ego to focus on how much better you are doing compared to them, it will also build your ego to see how effectively you can help them to improve."

Given the district's current achievement levels, Ferguson is optimistic that changes in the community can lead to innovative ways to deal with the issue. "This is a really special time for Shaker," he said. "You have a new superintendent coming in, and things are going to change. The community in some ways can select its identity going forward. One identity is a segmented community where it is us versus them. A different image is a district where everyone is in it together. One where every segment of the community celebrates not only its own success and progress, but also the success and progress of all the other segments within the community."

How do you know when the achievement gap is no longer a problem? Ferguson put it simply. He said, "The goal for school districts and society at large is to get to the place where knowing someone's economic status, race or ethnicity is irrelevant to determining their level of achievement."

Inside the Investigation

To complete this investigation of the current status of the achievement gap in the district, 22 Shakerite editors collaborated in teams of four to five students over nine weeks to identify areas of inquiry, make records requests, interview students, teachers, administrators and scholars, visit district schools and research efforts made to close the achievement gap in schools across the nation. Print Editor in Chief Sarah-Jane Lorenzo, Print Managing Editor Kyra Hall, Web Editor in Chief Liz Jacob and Web Managing Editor Julia Scharfstein designed pages and organized staff efforts to examine the gap from specific angles. The editors involved in this investigation then wrote a series of in-depth articles, all of which are published at their full length on The Shakerite's website, shakerite.com. This is The Shakerite's first significant coverage of the achievement gap since February, 1997.

Misconceptions About Student Achievement

There is no doubt in my mind that Shaker has a huge achievement gap with minority students. But I believe that there are multiple reasons that attest to this fact.

There are many factors that contribute to the success of a student. And some of these factors are beyond a student's control. One of them, in my opinion, is personal motivation. I am sure that every student, at least once, had a moment when they did not feel like doing the work for whatever reason. When it comes to students who are not very successful in school, this is usually their state of mind 90 percent of the time. Because of this mindset, even when these students get all of the support possible, they still do not have that drive to achieve academically.

So therefore I believe that the first thing that needs to be done in order to close the achievement gap, is to find ways to motivate students. The problem with that solution is that even though it sounds easy, it is a lot harder to do than most people realize. The reason being is that in order to motivate these students, one has to be able to find equal ground with them in finding things that could motivate them. Equal ground, in most cases, can often be found when it comes to money and quality of life. This could mean that teachers and administrators could present the statistics of wages of students with a college degree compared to a student with just a high school diploma and also compare the wages of someone with a high school diploma compared to someone without one.

The next thing I would like to speak on is some of the stereotypes that are said regarding the students. It is commonly assumed that students who are not achieving are not getting support at home. I believe this statement cannot be made as a general statement about the lower-achieving students. The reason being is that the issue of parent involvement and the achievement gap are two separate issues and even though they can sometime overlap, in my opinion they need to be treated as two separate issues. What I have found is that a lot of students who are not doing well do have parents who care and want their child to do well, but they have a hard time keeping up with their child because of their own responsibilities. And there is only so much you can do for the child. You can take the horse to the water but you can't make it drink. The rest is up to the student. Therefore, I believe that parents cannot be held responsible for an act that should be the responsibility of the student.

Now I do believe that if a student does not have the proper academic resources at home then that can attribute to their academic success. Some of these resources may include a computer and a quiet work environment. If a student does not have some of these resources at home, Shaker offers every opportunity for these students to get these resources at school, resources such as conferences and tutoring. And again it is up to the student to take advantage of them. I believe that the achievement gap is not in place because of student ability. It can be significantly lessened if students find ways to get themselves motivated, apply themselves to their learning and also take responsibility for their learning.



Guest 'Rite

Will The Gap, State Ratings Affect Confidence in Schools?

Since federal and state laws mandating rating of public school systems were passed, diverse districts have struggled to meet indicators that report student achievement by categories such as race and socioeconomic status. As diverse districts continue to be rated lower than less diverse schools, concerns that residents will lose faith in their schools emerges. According to The Ohio Department of Education demographic statistics, both Cleveland Heights High School and Shaker Heights High School have experienced decreased enrollment over the past 10 years. According to Jack Morris, an Ohio Department of Education coordinator for Cleveland, in order for students to be considered economically disadvantaged, they must be eligible for a free lunch in school, and their family earnings must fall below federal income levels. Decrease in enrollment at SHHS includes a 4.8 percent drop in female students in the past 10 years. Hathaway Brown, a private girls' school in Shaker, is currently attempting to fill a new position known as the Director of Middle School Admissions due to "robust enrollment growth during the past decade."

THEN
1999



FEMALE
MALE

	F	M
BLACK	72%	38%
WHITE	25%	12%
ASIAN	2%	1%
STATISTICS NOT PROVIDED		1%

CLEVELAND
HEIGHTS

FEMALE
MALE

	F	M
BLACK	39%	39%
WHITE	9%	17%
ASIAN	0%	2%
MULTIRACIAL	N/A	3%

NOW
2010



THEN

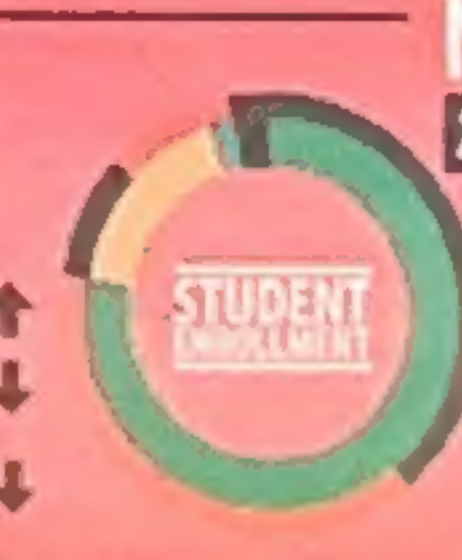
FEMALE
MALE

	F	M
BLACK	51%	28%
WHITE	44%	24%
ASIAN	3%	1%
MULTIRACIAL	2%	1%

SHAKER
HEIGHTS

FEMALE
MALE

	F	M
BLACK	39%	39%
WHITE	9%	17%
ASIAN	0%	2%
MULTIRACIAL	N/A	3%



NOW
2010

CLOSING THE G A P IN ELEMENTARY ACHIEVEMENT

PRINT EDITOR IN CHIEF: Sarah-Jane Lorenzo

COPY EDITOR: Leo Izen

SPOTLIGHT EDITOR: Bridget Cook

RAIDER ZONE EDITOR: Alex Smith

GRAPHIC ARTIST: Josh Jacobs

The district has implemented a variety of programs for students grades K-8

Elementary education plays an essential role in instilling and fine-tuning students' core academic skills from an early age. Since the achievement gap in Shaker caught the public eye 16 years ago, the district's seven elementary schools have made numerous efforts to set students in grades K-8 on a path to academic success. Schools have implemented a variety of during- and after-school programs to target students in need of academic support or motivation, and have introduced several online and in-class academic programs specifically aimed to boost student scores.

The academic gap begins at the start of children's educational careers. For many students, the quality of their elementary education affects their performance throughout their educational experience.

"Unfortunately, the academic gap begins in kindergarten on day one," said Fernway Elementary Principal Christopher Hayward. "We have students entering Fernway that can read small chapter books while at the same time we have kids entering that can't even read their name," he said. Across the country, schools have created intervention and tutoring programs to help the students who struggle at the elementary level. Shaker implements some of these programs such as tutoring before and after school and third and fourth grade scholars programs. These intervention systems "help teachers to understand how they can support their children," Hayward said.



The Woodbury Elementary faculty and administration have implemented a variety of programs to help narrow the gap, some technological and others involving team teaching.

Woodbury students partake in a computer program known as CCC, which helps build math concepts and skills. Students also use similar a program, Reading Plus, which build reading comprehension and speed. These programs are used regularly. Students also participate in Accelerated Reader, a program in which students read library books and receive credit. Teachers at Woodbury comprise teams of two and rotate classes so one teacher teaches math and science and the other teaches language arts (English) and social studies. Some teams divide students into higher and lower-level classes, but put always middle-achieving students in the higher class, so the higher-achieving students can help the middle ones. Enriched Language Arts and Enriched Math use similar strategies by lowering admission requirements for minorities so they can grow by being with higher achievers. Woodbury also employs intervention specialists to work with each team of teachers. The intervention specialists act as a third teacher and move around the classrooms, helping confused students.

Lower-achieving students are identified by teachers, and those students are targeted for additional support and instruction.

While test scores and state rankings indicate the achievement gap is present throughout the district, data has consistently implied that it may be most prominent at the middle school.

Of all eight Shaker schools, the middle school often receives the lowest rankings on many state and national assessments. Despite this, middle school Principal Danny Young believes middle school students are provided with plenty of programs and resources to promote their achievement.

The middle school currently offers programs that aim to support students at a range of achievement levels. According to Young, these programs include Junior Scholars, which prepares African-American students with GPAs of 2.6 or higher to become Minority Achievement Committee Scholars and MAC Sister Scholars in high school; Men on the Verge of Excellence, which targets African-American males with GPAs between 2.1 and 2.5 and aims to move them into the Junior Scholars program; and Pride, which provides role models and support for African-American males with GPAs below 2.0.

Young leads Pride for 8th grade students himself and has seen the performance of the students he works with improve. "Several of my young men -- out of my 25, I would say about 10 -- have improved themselves over a 2.0. And I'm very proud of that," he said. "Our goal is to get ready for the high school scholars." Middle school students are also provided with academic supports integrated into the school day. The middle school has introduced programs such as reading- and math-focused study halls, courses co-taught by regular teachers and intervention specialists and special math and reading courses for students whose achievement levels in those subjects are particularly low. Students are also encouraged to attend daily conferences with teachers after school and can also attend a homework tutoring center which meets from 4-5:30 p.m. each day.

